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FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9627
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAMAKO 000785

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2018
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SUBJECT: BAHANGA RELEASES MOST - BUT NOT ALL - MALIAN
PRISONERS TO LIBYAN CONSUL IN KIDAL

REF: BAMAKO 00779

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(U) Tuareg bandit turned rebel Ibrahim Bahanga released 44 Malian soldiers to the Libyan Consul to Mali, Musa el Koni, on September 10 in Kidal. Koni arrived in Kidal aboard a Libyan aircraft on September 9, carrying new uniforms for the released hostages and several tons of rice and sugar for their captors. The liberated hostages were immediately turned over to the Malian military which transported them to Gao for a welcome ceremony hosted by the Governor of Gao, Col. Ahmed Baba Toure, the Malian military's Chef d'Etat Major, Gen. Gabriel Poudiougou, and el Koni.

2.(C) Following the liberation, Tuareg contacts said they expected the Malian government to release an estimated 10 to 11 Tuareg combatants detained by the Malians. This exchange could be complicated by new reports indicating that Bahanga still has several Malian soldiers in his custody. Malian government sources told media outlets on September 10 that the 44 liberated individuals represented all of the Malian soldiers still in Tuareg rebel hands. Previous estimates, however, placed the number of hostages held by Bahanga at 60 to 65 individuals, suggesting that a dozen or more hostages remain unaccounted for. On September 11 Radio France altered its tone somewhat, reporting instead that Bahanga had released the "quasi-totality" of hostages and that at least four Malian soldiers remained in captivity. Acherif ag Mohamed and other Tuareg contacts told the Embassy on September 11 that they also believed Bahanga had 60 or more prisoners and that he was still holding at least four individuals. According to Tuaregs and the Red Cross Director in Kidal, at least two Malian soldiers died while in Bahanga's custody and a third died shortly after Bahanga released him on August 25-26.

3.(C) Bahanga himself is believed to be in Libya, along with fellow Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC) members Hama Moussa and Ibrahim Bana. Also with Bahanga is National Assembly Deputy, Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) "finance secretary" and renowned trafficker Deity ag Sidamou. A member of the Idnane fraction of Kidal Tuaregs, Ag Sidamou is known for acting independently of the ADC. This is the first indication of a link between ag Sidamou and Bahanga. According to Acherif, Bahanga, ag Sidamou and Hama Moussa are pursuing certain "common interests" in Tripoli - likely an allusion to illicit business propositions.

4.(C) Comment: The prisoner release was apparently not timed to coincide with a meeting of the Alliance for Democracy and Change in Tegharghar, also occurring on September 10 (Ref. A). There is no indication at this time that the prisoner release will alter Malian, ADC and Algerian plans to continue with the Algiers Accords implementation process sans Bahanga. Acherif said the Algerians had told

him they were "relieved" that Bahanga was now allied with Libya since Bahanga had previously done nothing but "perturb" the Algiers Accords implementation process supported by Mali, the ADC and Algeria.

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